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The most Bitter Foe of Nations, and the Way to its Permanent Overthrow.

AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY,

AT

YALE COLLEGE, JULY 25, 1866,

BY

ANDREW D. WHITE.

NEW HAVEN:

THOMAS H. PEASE, 323 CHAPEL STREET.

T. J. STAFFORD, PRINTER.

1866.

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NEW HAVEN, *July* 26, 1866.

DEAR SIR,

The undersigned have been appointed by the PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY a Committee to render you the cordial thanks of the Society for your admirable Address, delivered last evening, and to request a copy for the Press.

Respectfully and truly yours,

A. C. TWINING,

G. P. FISHER.

Professor WHITE.

STATE OF NEW YORK,

Senate Chamber,

Albany, Aug. 30th, 1866.

GENTLEMEN,

Accept my thanks for the very kind expressions regarding the Address which, in accordance with the request conveyed by you, I forward herewith.

With great respect,

Very truly yours,

A. D. WHITE.

Professors A. C. TWINING and
G. P. FISHER.

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ADDRESS.

In this sacred struggle and battle of so many hundred years,—this weary struggle of truths to be recognized,—this desperate battle of rights to be allowed;—in this long, broad current toward more truth and more right, in which are seen the hands of so many good and bad and indifferent men,—and in the midst of all, and surrounding all, the hand of very God,—what political institution has been most vigorous against this current,—what political system has been most noxious to political truth and right?—in short, what foe, in every land, have right and liberty found it hardest to fight or outwit?

Is it Ecclesiasticism?—is it Despotism?—is it Aristocracy?—is it Democracy?

The time allotted me this evening I shall devote to maintaining the following Thesis:

OF ALL SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS, THE MOST VIGOROUS IN BATTLING LIBERTY,—THE MOST NOXIOUS IN ADULTERATING RIGHT,—THE MOST CORROSIVE IN EATING OUT NATIONALITY, HAS BEEN AN ARISTOCRACY BASED UPON HABITS OR TRADITIONS OF OPPRESSION.

I shall also attempt to deduce from the proofs of this a corollary, showing *the only way in which such an Aristocracy ever has been or ever can be fought successfully and put down permanently.*

Let me first give this Thesis precision.

I do not say that Aristocracy, based upon habits and tra-

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ditions of oppression, is the foe which takes deepest hold;—Despotism and Ecclesiasticism are dragons which get their claws far deeper into the body politic;—for Despotism clutches more temporal, and Ecclesiasticism more eternal interests.

Nor do I say that Aristocracy is the enemy most difficult to find and come at. Demoralization in Democracy is harder to find and come at; for demoralization in Democracy is a disease, and lurks,—Aristocracy is a foe, and stands forth—bold; Demoralization is latent, and political doctors disagree about it,—Aristocracy is patent, and men of average sense soon agree about it.

But the statement is that Aristocracy, based upon oppression, is, of all foes to liberty the most vigorous, of all foes to rights the most noxious, and of all foes to nationality the most corrosive.

Other battles may be longer;—but the battle with Aristocracy is the sharpest which a nation can be called upon to wage,—and as a nation uses its strength during the contest —and *as it uses its wits after the contest*—so shall you find its whole national life a success or a failure.

For my proofs I shall not start with *a priori* reasoning:—that shall come in as it is needed in the examination of historical facts. You shall have the simple, accurate presentation of facts from history—and plain reasoning upon these facts—and from Ancient History, rich as it is in proofs, I will draw nothing!—all shall be drawn from the history of modern States —the history of men living under the influence of great religious and political ideas which are active to-day—and among ourselves.

Foremost among the examples of the normal working of an Aristocracy based upon the subjection of a class, I name SPAIN. I name her first—not as the most striking example, but as one of those in which the evil grew most naturally, and went through its various noxious phases most regularly.

The fabric of Spanish nationality had much strength and much beauty. The mixture of the Barbarian element with the Roman, after the Roman downfall, was probably happier there than in any other part of Europe. The Visigoths gave Spain

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the best of all the barbaric codes. Guizot has shown how,* as by inspiration, some of the most advanced ideas of modern enlightened codes were incorporated into it.

The succeeding history of the Spanish nation was also, in its main sweep, fortunate. There were ages of endurance which toughened the growing nation,—battles for right which ennobled it;—disasters which compacted manliness and squeezed out effeminacy.

This character took shape in goodly institutions. The city growth helped the growth of liberty, not less in Spain than in her sister nations. Cities and towns became not merely centres of prosperity, but guardians of freedom.†

Then came, perhaps, the finest growth of free institutions in Mediæval Europe.

The Cortes of Castile was a representative body nearly a hundred years before Simon de Montfort laid the foundations of English parliamentary representation at Leicester.‡ The Commons of Arragon had gained yet greater privileges earlier.

Statesmen sat in these—statesmen who devised curbs for monarchs, and forced monarchs to wear them. The dispensing power was claimed at an early day by Spanish Kings as by Kings of England;—but Hallam acknowledges § that the Spaniards made a better fight against this despotic claim than did the English. The Spanish established the Constitutional principle that the King cannot dispense with statutes centuries before the English established it by the final overthrow of the Stuarts.

Many sturdy maxims, generally accounted fruit of that early English boldness for liberty, are of that earlier Spanish period. "No taxation without representation" was a principle asserted in Castile early, often and to good purpose. In Arragon no war could be declared,—no peace made,—no money coined without consent of the Cortes.‖

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* History of Civilization in Europe. Third Lecture.

† Sempere, *Histoire des Cortes d'Espagne,* Chap. 6.

‡ Prescott's Ferdinand and Isabella. Introduction, p. 48.

§ Hallam's Hist. of Middle Ages, Vol. 2, p. 30.

‖ Robertson's Introduction to Life of Charles V., Section 3d; also Prescott.

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The "Great Privilege of Saragossa" gave quite as many, and quite as important liberties to Arragon as were wrested from King John for England in the same century.

Such is a meagre sketch of the development of society at large. As regards the other development which goes to produce civilization—the development of individual character, the Spanish peninsula was not less distinguished. In its line of monarchs were Ferdinand III., Alfonso X., James II., and Isabella;—in its line of statesmen were Ximenes and Cisneros —worthy predecessors of that most daring of all modern statesmen, Alberoni. The nation rejoiced too in a noble line of poets and men of letters.*

Still more important than these brilliant exceptions was the tone of the people at large. They were tough and manly.†

No doubt there were grave national faults. Pride—national and individual—constantly endangered quiet. Blind submission to Ecclesiastical authority was also a fearful source of evil! Yet, despite these, it is impossible not to be convinced, on a careful reading of Spanish history, that the influence which tore apart States,—which undermined good institutions, —which defeated justice,—which disheartened effort,—which prevented resistance to encroachments of Ecclesiasticism and Despotism—nay, which made such encroachments a *necessity* —came from the *nobility*.

The Spanish nobility had risen and become strong in those long wars against the intruding Moors,—they had gained additional strength in the wars between provinces. They soon manifested necessary characteristics. They kept Castile in confusion by their dissensions,—they kept Arragon in confusion by their anti-governmental unions.

Accustomed to lord it over inferiors, they could brook no opposition,—hence all their influence was Anarchic; accustomed to no profitable labor of any sort, their influence was for

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* What an effect this early liberty had in stimulating thought can be seen in a few moments by glancing over the pages of Ticknor's History of Spanish Literature.

† For some statements as to hardy characteristics of Spanish peasantry, see Doblado's Letters from Spain. Letter 2.

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laziness and wastefulness;—accustomed to look on public matters as their monopoly, they devoted themselves to conjuring up phantoms of injuries and insults, and plotting to avenge them.

Every Aristocracy passes through one, and most Aristocracies through both of two historic phases.

The first may be called the *Vitriolic*,—the period of intense, biting, corrosive activity,—the period in which it gnaws fiercely into all institutions with which it comes into contact,—the period in which it decomposes all elements of nationality.

In Spain this first period was early developed and long continued. Grandees and nobles bit and cut their way into the Legislative system,—by brute force, too, they crushed their way through the Judicial system,—by judicious mixtures of cheating and bullying they often controlled the Executive system.

Chapter after chapter of Mariana's history begins with the story of their turbulence, and ends with the story of its sad results;—how the nobles seized King James of Arragon;—how the Lara family usurped the Government of Castile;—how the houses of Lara, Haro, Castro and their peers are constantly concocting some plot, or doing some act to overthrow all governmental stability.

But their warfare was not merely upon Government and upon each other;—it was upon the people at large. Out from their midst comes a constant voice of indignant petitions. These are not merely petitions from serfs. No! history written in stately style has given small place to their cries;—but the great flood of petitions and remonstrances comes from the substantial middle class, who saw this domineering upper class trampling out every germ of commercial and manufacturing prosperity.

Such was the current of Spanish history. I now single out certain aristocratic characteristics bedded in it which made its flow so turbulent.

Foremost of these was that first and most fatal characteristic of all aristocracies based on oppression—*the erection of a substitute for patriotism.*

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Devotion to caste, in such circumstances, always eats out love of country. A nobility often fight for their country—often die for it;—but in any supreme national emergency,—at any moment of moments in national history the rule is that you are sure to find them asking—not "What is my duty to my country?" but "*What is my duty to my order?*"

Every crisis in Spanish history shows this characteristic,—take one example to show the strength of it.

Charles the Fifth was the most terrible of all monarchic foes to the old Spanish institutions. The nobles disliked him for this. They also disliked him still more as a foreigner. Most of all they disliked him because the tools he used in overturning Spain were foreigners.

Against this detested policy the cities of the kingdom planned a policy thoughtful and effectual. Cardinal Cisneros favored it,—the only thing needed was the conjunction of the nobles. They seemed favorable—but at the supreme moment they wavered. The interest of the country was clear;—but *how as to the interests of their order?* They began by fearing encroachments of the people;—they ended by becoming traitors, allowed the battle of Villalar to be lost—and with it the last chance of curbing their most terrible enemy.*

Another characteristic was *the development of a substitute for political morality.*

These nobles were brave. The chronicles gave them plentiful supply of chivalric maxims, and they carried these out into chivalric practices. Their quickness in throwing about them the robes of chivalry was only excelled by their quickness in throwing off the garb of ordinary political morality. They could die for an idea, yet we constantly see among them acts of bad faith—petty and large—only befitting savages.

John Alonzo de la Cerda, by the will of the late King, had been deprived of a certain office; he therefore betrays the stronghold of Myorga to the new King's enemies.† Don Alonzo de Lara had caused great distress by his turbulence. Queen Berengaria writes an account of it to the King. Don Alonzo

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* Sempere, p. 205.

† Mariana Hist. of Spain.

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does not scruple to waylay the messenger, murder him, and substitute for the true message a forgery, containing an order in the Queen's hand for the King's murder.* Of such warp and woof is the history of the Spanish aristocracy—the history of nobles whose boast was their chivalry.

How is this to be accounted for? Mainly by the fact, I think, that the pride engendered by lording it over a subject class lifts men above ordinary morality. If commonplace truth and vulgar good faith fetter that morbid will-power which serf-owning gives, truth and good faith must be rent asunder.

The next characteristic was *the erection of a theory of easy treason and perpetual anarchy.*

Prescott calls this whimsical; he might more justly have called it frightful.

For this theory, which they asserted, maintained, and finally brought into the national notion and custom was, that in case they were aggrieved—*themselves being judges*—they could renounce their allegiance,—join the bitterest foes of king and nation,—plot and fight against their country,—deluge the land in blood,—deplete the treasury; and yet that the King should take care of the families they left behind, and in other ways make treason pastime.

Spanish history is black with the consequences of this theory. Mariana drops a casual expression in his history which shows the natural result, when he says: "The Castro family were *much in the habit* of revolting and going over to the Moors."†

The absurdity of this theory was only equaled by its iniquity.

For it involved three ideas absolutely fatal to any State—*the right of peaceable secession—the right of judging in their own cause, and the right of committing treason with impunity.* Now, any nation which does not, when stung by such a theory, throttle it, and stamp the life out of it, is doomed.

Spain did not grapple with it. She tampered with it, truckled to it, compromised with it.

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* Mariana, History of Spain. † Mariana, History of Spain, XIII. 11.

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This nursed another characteristic in her nobility, which is sure to be developed always under like circumstances. This characteristic was *an aristocratic inability to appreciate concessions.*

The ordinary sort of poor statesmanship which afflicts this world generally meets the assumptions and treasons of a man-mastering caste by concessions. The commercial and manufacturing classes love peace and applaud concessions. But concessions only make matters worse. Concessions to a caste, based upon traditions of oppression, are but fuel to fire. The more privileges are given, the higher blazes its pride, and pride is one of the greatest causes of its noxious activity. Concessions to such a caste are sure to be received as tributes to its superiority. Such concessions are regarded by it not as favors but as rights, and no man ever owed gratitude for a right.

There remained then but one way of dealing with it,—that was by overwhelming force; and at the end of the Fifteenth Century that force appeared. The encroachments upon regular central government produced the same results in Spain as in the rest of Europe at about the same time.

To one not acquainted with previous history, but looking thoughtfully at the fifteenth century, it must seem strange that just at that time—as by a simultaneous and spontaneous movement—almost every nation in Europe consolidated power in the hands of a monarch. In France, in England, in Italy, as well as in Spain, you see institutions, liberties, franchises, boundaries sacrificed freely to establish despotism. You see Henry VII. in England, Louis XI. in France, Charles V., a little later, in Germany and Italy, Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain —almost all utterly unlovely and unloved—allowed to build up despotisms in all cases severe, and in most cases cruel. Why? Because the serf-owning caste had become utterly unbearable; because one tyrant is better than a thousand.

Then the Spanish nobility went into the next phase. Ferdinand, Charles the Fifth, Philip the Second—three of the harshest tyrants known to history,—having crushed out the boldness and enterprise of the aristocracy it passed from what

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I have called the *Vitriolic* into what might be called the *Narcotic period.*

A period this was in which the noble became an agent in stimulating all evil tendencies in the monarch, and in stupefying all good tendencies in the people.

The caste spirit was a drug infused into the body politic, rendering inert all its powers for good. Did Charles the Fifth insult and depose Ximenes,—the nation sleepily permitted it; did Philip the Second lay bigot plans which brought the kingdom to ruin,—the nation lazily fawned upon him for it;* did Philip III. and his successors allow the nation to sink into contempt,—there was no voice to raise it.

Do you say that this resulted from Ecclesiasticism? I answer that the main reason why Ecclesiasticism became so strong was because it sheltered the lower class from the exactions of the Aristocracy. Do you say that it resulted from Despotism? I answer that Despotism became absolute in order to save the nation from the turbulence of the Aristocracy.†

No single Despotism, either in Church or State, could by itself have broken that well-knit system of old Spanish liberties. It was the growth of an oppressive caste, who by their spirit of disunion made Despotism possible, and by their spirit of turbulence made it necessary.

The next nation in which I would show the working of a caste with traditions of oppression is ITALY.

Man-owners had cost Italy dear already. Roman serf-culture had withered all prosperity in the country; slave service had eaten out all manliness from the city.

It is one of the most pregnant facts in history, and one which, so far as I know, has never been noted, that whereas the mul-

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* "There probably never lived a prince who, during so long a period, was adored by his subjects as Philip II. was." Buckle, Vol. II., page 21. This explains the popularity of Henry VIII. of England better than all Froude's volumes, able as they are.

† All this examination into Aristocratic agency in Spanish decline is left out of Buckle's Summary. He passes at once to Ecclesiasticism and Despotism; but the unprejudiced reader will, I think, see that this statement is supplementary to that. In no other way can any man explain the fatuity of the Spaniards in throwing away these old liberties.

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titude who have written upon the subject have assigned innumerable causes for the decline and downfall of the Roman nation, *not one of any note has failed to name, as a cause, Roman slavery.* As to other causes they disagree—on this alone all agree.

The philosophers Montesquieu* and Gibbon,† the economist Sismondi,‡ the *doctrinaire* Guizot,§ the republican Michelet,‖ the eclectic Schlosser,¶ high tory Alison,** moderate Merivale,†† democrat Bancroft,‡‡ *quasi* conservative, *quasi* liberal Charles Kingsley,§§ wide apart as the poles on all else, agree to name as a cause of Roman ruin the system of forced labor.

But after the Roman downfall the struggle of Italy with her upper caste seems singularly fortunate. At an early day her cities by commerce became rich and strong. Then in the natural course of things—first, free ideas, next, free institutions, next, war upon the nobles to make them respect these ideas and institutions.

The war of municipalities against nobles was successful. Elsewhere in Europe cities sheltered themselves behind lords; in Italy lords sheltered themselves in cities. Elsewhere the lord dwelt in the castle *above* the city; in Italy the lord was forced to dwell in his palace *within* the city.‖‖

The victory of freedom seemed complete. The Italian republics were triumphant; the nobility were, to all appearance, subdued.

But those republics made a fearful mistake. They had a

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* *Grandeur et Décadence des Romains;* English translation of 1784; pp. 109–10. Compare also *L'Esprit des Lois,* liv. xiv., chap. 1.

† Decline and Fall of Roman Empire, chap. 2.

‡ Fall of Roman Empire, last part of chap. 1.

§ *Histoire de la Civilisation en France,* 2mc Leçon.

‖ History of Roman Republic, Boook III., chap. 1.

¶ Schlosser, *Weltgeschichte für das Deutsche Volk;* vol. iv., xiv., 1.

** Essay on the Fall of Rome; Essays, vol. iii., p. 445.

†† History of the Romans, vol. vii., pp. 480–81.

‡‡ Bancroft's Miscellanies.

§§ The Roman and the Teuton—Lectures delivered before the University of Cambridge, p. 20.

‖‖ Guizot, *Civilisation en Europe,* 10*me Leçon;* also Trollope's History of Florence, vol. i., chap. 2.

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great chance to destroy caste and lost it. They allowed the old caste spirit to remain, and that evil leaven soon renewed its work. The republics showed generalship in war, but in peace they were outwitted.

First, the nobles insisted on pretended rights within the city, and stirred perpetual civil war to make these rights good.*

Beaten at this they had yet a worse influence. Those great free cities would not indeed allow the nobles to indulge in private wars, but gradually the cities caught the infection from the nobles. The cities caught their aristocratic spirit of jealousy,—took nobles as leaders,—ran into their modes of plotting and fighting, and what I have called the *Vitriolic* period set in.

Undoubtedly some of this propensity came from other causes, but the main cause was this domineering aristocracy in its midst, giving tone to its ideas. Free cities in other parts of Europe disliked each other,—a few fought each other,—but none with a tithe of the insane hate and rage shown by the city republics of Italy.†

Hence arose that political product sure to rise in every nation where an aristocracy shape policy, the *Spirit of Disunion.* Its curse has been upon Italy for five hundred years. Dante felt it when he sketched the torments of Riniero of Corneto and Riniero Pazzo,‡ and the woes brought on Florence by the feuds of the Neri and Bianchi.§ Sismondi felt it when his thoughts of Italian disunion wrung from his liberty-loving heart a longing for Despotism.‖ All Italy felt it when Genoa, in these last years, solemnly restored to Pisa the trophies gained in those old civil wars, and hung them up in the Campo Santo behind the bust of Cavour.

No other adequate reason for the chronic spirit of disunion

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* Trollope's History of Florence, as above.

† Any historical student can easily satisfy himself of the truth of this statement by comparing the cases given by Barante in his *Hist. des Ducs de Bourgogne* with those given by Sismondi in the *Hist. des Républiques Italiennes.*

‡ *Inferno;* canto xii., 138.

§ *Ibid;* canto vi., 60.

‖ *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes,* vol. x.

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in Italy than the oppressive aristocratic spirit can be given. Italy was blest with every influence for unity;—a most favorable position and conformation, boundaries sharply defined on three sides by seas and on the remaining side by lofty mountains, a great devotion to trade, a single great political tradition, a single great religious tradition, both drawing the nation toward one great central city.

Had Italy been left to herself without the disturbing influence of this chivalric, uneasy, plotting, fighting caste, who can doubt that petty rivalries would have been extinguished and all elements fused into a great, strong Nationality?

Turn from this history and construct such a society with your own reason. You shall find it all very simple. Put into energetic free cities or states a body of men accustomed to lord it over an inferior caste, whose main occupation is to brood over wrongs and to hatch revenges, and you ensure disunion between that state and sister states speedily. To such men every movement of a sister state is cause for suspicion, every betterment cause for quarrel.

But you ensure more than that. Under such circumstances *disunion is always followed by disintegration.* They are two inevitable stages of one disease. In the first stage the idea of country is lost; in the second, the idea of government is lost; disintegration is closely followed by Anarchy, and Despotism has generally been the only remedy.

To Italy in this strait despotism was the remedy. Disunion between *all* Italian Republics was followed by disintegration between factions in *each* Italian Republic. A multitude of city tyrants rose to remedy disintegration,—a single tyrant rose above all to remedy disunion.

These were welcomed because they at least mitigated anarchy. If a Visconti or a Sforza was bad at Milan, he was better than a multitude of tyrants. If the Scala were severe at Verona, they were less severe than the crowd of competitors whom they put down. If Rienzi was harsh at Rome, he was milder than the struggles of the Colonna and Orsini,—if the Duke of Athens was at once contemptible and terrible at

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Athens, he was neither so contemptible nor so terrible as the feuds of the Cerchi and Donati.

And when, at last, Charles the Fifth crushed all these seething polities into a compact despotism, that was better than disunion, disintegration and anarchy.

This compression of anarchic elements ended the Vitriolic period of Italian Aristocracy, but it brought on the Narcotic period. It was the most fearful reign of cruelty, debauchery and treachery between the orgies of Vitellius and De Sade.

Yet those debaucheries and murders among the Borgias and later Medici, and so many other leading families, were but types of what this second phase of an oppressive aristocracy *must* be.

For the domineering caste-spirit immediately on its repression breaks out in cruelty. This is historical, and a moment's thought will show you that it is logical. The development of the chivalric noble into the cruel schemer is very easily traced.

Given such a lordling forced to keep the peace, and you have a character which, if it resigns itself, sinks into debauchery—which, if it resists, flies into plotting. Now both the debauchee and the plotter regard bodies and souls of inferiors as mere counters in their games,—hence they *must* be cruel.*

I turn now to another nation where the serf-mastering spirit wrought out its fearful work in yet a different manner, and on a more gigantic scale,—in a manner so brilliant that it has dazzled the world for centuries, and blazoned its faults as virtues;—on a scale so great that it has sunk art, science, literature, education, commerce and manufactures,—brought misery upon its lower caste,—brought death upon its upper caste,—and has utterly removed its nation from modern geography, and its name from modern history. I point you to POLAND.

Look at Polish history as painted by its admirers,—it is noble and beautiful. You see political scenes, military scenes, and individual lives which at once win you.

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* For the working out of this principle by French and English nobilities into cruelties more frightful and inexcusable than any known to the Inquisition, see Orderic Vital Liv. XII. and XIII., also Barante's *Histoire des Ducs de Bourgogne.*

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Go back three centuries,—stand on those old towers of Warsaw,—look forth over the Plains of Volo. The nation is gathered there. Its King it elects. The King thus elected is limited in power so that his main function is to do justice. The whole voting body are *equals*. Each, too, is *free*. No King, no Noble, is allowed to trench upon his freedom. So free is each that no will of the majority is binding upon him, except by his own consent. Here is equality indeed! Equality pushed so far that each man is not only the equal of every other—but of all others together;—the equal of the combined nation.

These men are brave, hardy, and, as you have seen, free, equal, and allowed more rights than the citizens of any republic before or since.*

But leave now this magnificent body—stretching over those vast plains beyond eye-reach. Tear yourselves away from the brave show—the flash of jeweled sabres and crosiers—the glitter of gilded trappings—the curvetings of noble horses between tents of silk and banners of gold-thread. Go out into the country from which these splendid freemen come.

Here is indeed a revelation! Here is a body of men whom history has forgotten. Strangely indeed—for it is a body far larger than that assembled upon the plains of Volo. *There* were, perhaps, a hundred thousand; *here* are millions. These millions are Christians, but they are wretchedly clad and bent with labor. They are indeed stupid,—unkempt,—degraded,—often knavish,—but they love their country,—toil for her,—suffer for her.

To them, in times of national struggles, all the weariness,—to them, in times of national triumphs, none of the honor.

These are the *serfs* of those brilliant beings prancing and caracoling and flashing on yonder plain of Volo—to the applauding universe.

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* For examples of the brilliant side of Polish history presented, and dark side forgotten, see Chodzko *La Pologne Historique Monumentale et Pittoresque.* For fair summaries, see Alison's Essay, and his chapter on Poland, in the History of Europe—the best chapter in the book. The main authorities I have followed are Rulhière and Salvandy.

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Evidently then, there has been a mistake here. History and poetry have forgotten to mention a fact supremely important.

The *people* of Poland are, after all, *not* free—*not* equal. The voting is not voting by the *people*. Freedom and the suffrage are for *serf-owners*,—equality is between *them*.

No one can deny that in this governing class were many, very many noble specimens of manhood—yielding ease and life for ideas—readily.

Emperor Henry the Fifth of Germany had tried in vain to overcome them by war. When the Polish ambassador came into his presence, the Emperor pointed to his weapon, and said, "I could not overcome your nobility with *these;*"—then pointing to an open chest filled with gold, he said, "but I will conquer them with *this*." The ambassador wore the chains and jewels befitting his rank. Straitway he takes off every ornament, and flings all into the Emperor's chest together.

Yet myriads of such men could not have averted ruin. Polish history proved it day by day.

It was not that these nobles were especially barbarous,—it was not that they were effeminate. *It was simply that they maintained one caste above another—allowing a distinction in civil and political rights.* The system gave its usual luxuriant fruitage of curses.

First in the *material* condition. Labor and trade were despised. If, in the useful class, a genius arose, the first exercise of his genius was to get himself out of the useful class. Labor was left to serfs; trade was left to Jews. Cities were contemptible in all that does a city honor. Villages were huddles. The idea thus implanted remains. Of all countries, called civilized, Poland seems to-day, materially, the most hopeless.*

It may be said that this results from Russian invasions;—but it was so *before* Russian invasions. It may be said that it results from Russian oppression,—but the great central districts of Russia are just as much under the Czar, and they are thriving. It may be said that Poland has been wasted by war;—but Belgium and Holland and the Rhine Palatinate

* This statement is based upon my own observations in Poland in the years 1855–6.

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have been far more severely wasted, yet their towns are hives, and their country districts gardens.

Next, as to the *Political* condition.

A man-mastering caste necessarily develops the individual will morbidly and intensely. The most immediate of political consequences is, of course, a clash between the individual will and the general will.

Trouble then breaks forth in different forms in different countries. In Spain we saw it take shape in *Secession;*—in Italy we saw it lead to fearful territorial *Disunion;*—in Poland it first took the form of *Nullification.*

The nullifying spirit naturally crystallized into an institution. That institution was the *Liberum Veto.*

By this, in any national assemblage—no matter how great, no matter how important,—the veto of a single noble could stop all proceedings. Every special interest of every petty district or man had power of life and death over the general interest. The whim, or crotchet, or spite of a single man could and did nullify measures vital to the whole nation. In 1652, Sizinski, a noble sitting in the national diet, when great measures were supposed to be unanimously determined upon, left his seat, signifying his dissent. The whole vast machinery was stopped, and Poland made miserable.*

Closely allied to this was another political consequence.

Constant, healthful watchfulness over rights is necessary in any republic; but there is a watchfulness which is not healthful; it is the morbid watchfulness—the jealousy which arises in the minds of a superior caste, *living generally in contact with inferiors, and only occasionally in contact with equals.*

The Polish citizen lived on his estate. About him were inferiors,—beings who were not citizens—depending on him—doing him homage. But when the same citizen entered that Assembly on the Plains of Volo all this was changed. There he met his equals. Pride then clashed with pride,—faction rose against faction.

The result I will not state in my own words, for fear it may

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* Rulhiere, *Anarchie de Pologne.* Vol. I., page 47.

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be thought I warp facts to make a historical parallel. I shall translate word for word from Salvandy:

"*Confederations* were now formed—armed leagues of a number of nobles who chose for themselves a Marshal or President, and opposed decrees to decrees, force to force; contending diets which raised leader against leader, and had the King sometimes as chief, sometimes as captive; an institution deplorable and insensate, which opened to all discontented men a legal way to set their country on fire."*

From the political causes I have named logically flowed another.

In that perpetual anarchy, some factions must be beaten. But a class with traditions and habits of oppression is very different, when beaten, from a society swayed by manufacturing, commercial, and legal interests. These last try to make some arrangement. They yield, and fit matters to the new conditions. They are anxious to get back to their work again. But a class with habits of domineering has its own peculiar pride to deal with. It has leisure to brood over defeat, to whine over lost advantages, to fret over lost consideration, and you generally find it soon plotting more insidiously than before.

So it was with Poland. The beaten factions did what fighting aristocracies always do when fearful of defeat, or embittered by it,—the vilest thing they can do, and the most dangerous —*they intrigued for foreign intervention.*

Of all things, this is most fatal to nationality. Going openly over to the enemy is bad; but intrigues with foreign powers, hostile by interest and tradition, are unutterably vile.

Yet there is not a nation where a class pursuing separate and distinct rights is tolerated, where such intrigues have not been frequent. More than this, such intrigues have generally been timed with diabolic sagacity.

The time chosen is generally some national emergency—when the nation is writhing in domestic misfortunes, or battling desperately against foreign foes. The Spanish nobles chose their time for intriguing with the Moors for their inter-

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* Salvandy, *Vie de Jean Sobieski.* Vol. I., page 115.

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vention, when the Spanish nation were in the most desperate struggle—not merely for temporal power, but even for the existence of their religion.

In France, the nobles chose such periods as those when Richelieu was leading the nation against all Europe and a large part of France. In Poland, the nobles chose the times when the nation was struggling against absolute annihilation.*

History, to one not blinded by Polish bravery, is clear here. The real authors of the partition of Poland were not Frederick of Prussia, and Maria Theresa of Austria, and Catherine of Prussia, but those proud nobles who drew surrounding nations to intervene in Polish politics.

The *Social* condition was also affected naturally. Poland went into the inevitable narcotic phase. Her court during the reigns of its later Kings was a brothel, and her nobles its worthy tenants.

What followed was natural. When the light of the last century streamed in upon this corrupt mass, Zamoiski and men like him tried to purify it,—to enfranchise the subordinate caste,—to work reforms. The Polish Republic refused. Then Providence began a work radical and terrible.

It is sad to see those brave citizen-nobles crushed beneath brute force of Russians, and Austrians, and Prussians. But it was well. One Alexander the First *would have* done, one Alexander the Second *has* done more good for Poland than ages of citizen serf-masters flourishing on the Plains of Volo.

The next nation to which I direct you is FRANCE.

Of all modern aristocracies, hers has probably been the most hated.† Guizot, in some respects its apologist, confesses this. Eugenie de Guerin—the most angelic soul revealed to this age—herself of noble descent—declares that the sight even of a ruined chateau made her shudder.‡ But all that history, rich

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* The effects of Polish anarchy at home and intrigue abroad are pictured fully in a few simple touches in the "*Journal du Voyage de Boyard Chérémétieff.*" (*Bibliothéque Russe et Polonaise.*) Vol. IV., page 13.

† To understand the causes of this deep hatred, see Monteil, *Histoire des Francais des divers Etats, Epitre* 22.

‡ St. Beuve, *Causeries de Lundi.* Also Matthew Arnold's Essays.

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as it is in illustrations of the noxious qualities of an oppressive aristocracy, I will pass, save as it presents the *dealing of statesmen with it*, their attempts to thwart it and crush it.

A succession of monarchs and statesmen kept up these attempts during centuries. Philip Augustus, Louis VI. and Louis VII., Suger, St. Louis, Philip the Long, all wrought well at this.

The great thing to notice in that mediaeval French statesmanship is that *they attacked the domineering caste in the right way*. Every victory over it was followed not merely by setting serfs free, but by giving them civil rights, and, to some extent, political rights. When one of the Kings I have named gave a Charter of Community, he did not merely make the serf a nominal freedman; he also gave him rights, and thus wrought him into a bulwark between the central power and the rage of the former master.*

So far all was good. The great difficulty was that none of those monarchs or statesmen obtained physical power enough to enforce this policy throughout France. It was mainly confined to towns.

But in the middle of the Fifteenth Century came the most persistent man of all—Louis the Eleventh. He gained power throughout the kingdom. If a noble became turbulent, he hunted him; if this failed, he entrapped him. Cages, dungeons, racks, gibbets, he used in extinguishing this sort of political vermin; and he used them freely and beneficially.

His policy seems cruel. Our weak women of both sexes, with whom the tears of a murderer's mistress outweigh the sufferings of a crime-ridden community, will think so. It was really merciful. Louis was, probably, a scoundrel; but he was not a fool, and he saw that the greatest cruelty he could commit would be to make concessions and try to *win over* the nobility. His hard, sharp sense showed him—what all history shows—that an oppressive caste can be crushed, but that wheedled and persuaded it cannot be.

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* Guizot, *Civilisation en France*, 19*me Leçon*; also *Hüllman's Staedtewesen des Mittelalters*. Vol. III., Chapter 1.

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But Louis forgot one thing, and that the most important. Merely to *defeat* an aristocracy was not enough. *He forgot to provide guarantees for the lower classes*—he forgot to put rights into their hands which should enable them forever to check and balance the upper class when his hand was removed. You see that this mistake is just the reverse of that committed by previous statesmen.

Of course then, after the death of Louis, France relapsed into her old anarchy. Occasionally a strong King or city put a curb upon the nobles; but, in the main, it was the old bad history with variations ever more and more painful.

Over a hundred years more of this sort went by, and the rule of the nobles became utterly unbearable. The death of Henry the Fourth, in 1610, left on the throne a weak child as King, and behind the throne a weak woman as Regent. The nobles wrought out their will completely. They seized fortifications, plundered towns, emptied the treasury, domineered over the monarch, and impoverished the people. Curiously enough, too, to one who has not seen the same fact over and over in history, the nobles, during all these outrages of theirs, were declaiming, and groaning, and whining over their grievances and want of rights.*

Compromise after compromise was made, and to no purpose. No sooner were compromises made than they were broken. Finally, a great statesman, recognizing the futility of compromises, gave the aristocracy battle. This statesman was Richelieu.

The nobles tried all their modes of working I have shown in other countries. They tried nullification, secession, disunion. They intrigued for the intervention of Spain. They preferred caste to country, and attempted to desert France at the moment of her sorest need—at the siege of La Rochelle.

But Richelieu was too strong for them. His victories were magnificent. While he lived France had peace.†

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* For these preposterous complaints and claims see the *Cahiers de doléances* quoted in Sir James Stephens' Lectures.

† Some details of Richelieu's grapple with the aristocracy I have given in the Atlantic Monthly, Vol. ix., page 611.

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Yet he makes the same mistake which Louis XI. had made. He defeats the upper caste; but he guarantees no rights to the lower caste; therefore he gives France no barrier against that old flood of evils—save his own hand, and when death removes that, chaos comes again.

Mazarin now grapples with them. They give him a fearful trial. They throw France into civil war. They pretend zeal for liberty, and form an anarchic alliance with the poor old stupid Parliament of Paris. They make Mazarin miserable. They throw filth upon him, then light him up with their fire-works of wit, and set the world laughing at him. Then they drive him out of France; but he is keen and strong, and finally throws his nets over them, and France has another breathing time.

But the nobility if quiet are not a whit more beneficial—they are virulent and cynical as ever. Mazarin commits the same fault which Louis XI. and Richelieu had committed before him.

His mind was keen always, bold sometimes—yet never keen enough to see, or bold enough to try the policy of giving France a guarantee of perpetnal peace, by raising up that lower class, and giving them rights, civil and political, which should attach them to the legitimate government, and make them a balancing body against the aristocracy.

It is wonderful! Great men, fighting single-handed against thousands, clear in foresight and insight, quick in planning, vigorous in executing, finding every path to advantage, hurling every weighty missile, seeing everything, daring everything, except that one simple, broad principle in statesmanship which could have saved France from anarchy then and from revolution afterwards.

Gentlemen, it is a great lesson and a plain one. Diplomacy based on knowledge of the ordinary motives of ordinary men is strong,—statesmanship based on close study of the interests and aims of states and classes is strong;—but there is a Diplomacy and a Statesmanship infinitely stronger. Infinitely stronger are the Diplomacy and Statemanship whose master is a *heart*,—a heart with an instinct for truth and right;—a heart

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with a faith that on truth and right alone can peace be fitly builded.

Your common-place Cavour, with his deep instinct for Italian Liberty and Unity;—your uncouth Lincoln, with his deep instinct for American Liberty and Unity, are worth legions of compromise builders and conciliation mongers.

Mazarin delivered France into the hands of Louis XIV., and Louis brought them permanently into the narcotic phase. He stupefied them with sensuality,—attached them to his court,—made his palace the centre of their ambition,—gave scope to their fancy, by setting them at powdering and painting and frizzing,—gave scope to their activity by keeping them at gambling and debauchery,—weaned them from turbulence by stimulating them to decorate their bodies and to debase their souls.*

The central power was thus saved;—the people went on suffering as before.

Under the Regency of Louis XV. the nobility went from bad to worse. Their scorn for labor made them despise not merely those who toiled in Agriculture and Manufactures—it led them logically to openly neglect, and secretly despise professions generally thought the most honorable. When Racine ridiculed lawyers,† and when Moliere ridiculed physicians ‡ and scholars,§ they but yielded to this current.

Wise men saw the danger. Laws were passed declaring that commerce should not be derogatory to nobility. Abbé Coyer wrote a book to entice nobles into commerce. It had a captivating frontispiece, representing a nobleman elegantly dressed going on board a handsome merchant ship.‖ All in vain. The serf-mastering traditions were too strong.

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* For samples of the *mental* calibre of French nobility under this regime, see case of Baron de Breteuil, who believed that Moses wrote the Lord's Prayer. Bayle St. John's translation of St. Simon, Vol. I., p. 179. For sample of their *moral* debasement, see case of M. de Vendome. *Ibid.*, Vol. I., p. 187.

† In *Les Plaideurs.*

‡ *In Le Médecin Malgré lui,* and other plays.

§ *In Le Marriage Forcé.*

‖ *La Noblesse Commerçante.* London, 1756.

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The Revolution comes. The nobles stand out against the entreaties of Louis XVI.—the statesmanship of Turgot, the financial skill of Necker,—the keenness of Sieyes,—the boldness of Mirabeau. The very existence of France is threatened; but they have erected, as nobles always do, their substitute for patriotism. They stand by their order. Royalty yields to the third estate,—the clergy yield,—the nobility will not.

They are at last scared into momentary submission to right and justice and the spirit of the age. On the memorable Fourth of August they renounce their most hideous oppressions.

There is no end of patriotic speeches by these converts to liberty. The burden of all is the same. They are anxious to give up their oppressions. It is of no use to struggle longer, they are beaten, they will yield to save France.* Artists illustrate the great event, some pathetically, some comically.† The millennium seems arrived, a *Te Deum* is appointed. Yet plain common sense Buchez notes one thing in all this not so pleasant. In these "transports and outpourings," (*transports et l'effusion de sentiments genereux*,) one very important thing has been forgotten. *The nobles forget to give, and the people forget to take—guarantees.*‡

Woe to the people who trust merely the word of an upper caste habituated to oppression! Woe to the statesmen who do not at once crystallize such promises into constitutional and legislative acts!

These nobles shortly regretted their concessions and sought to evade them.§ The aristocrats whom they represented soon denied the right of their deputies to make these concessions, and soon after repudiated them.‖

How could it be otherwise? When you speak of concessions

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* For general account, see *Mignet, or Louis Blanc, or Thiers.* For speeches in detail, see *Buchez et Roux, Histoire Parlementaire,* Vol. II., pp. 224–243.

† *Challamel Histoire-Musée de la République Française,* Vol. I., pp. 72–75, where some of these illustrations can be found.

‡ *Buchez and Roux,* Vol. II., p. 231.

§ *Mignet,* Vol. I.

‖ *Histoire de la Révolution Française par Deux Amis de la Liberté,* Vol. II., p. 228.

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by a caste habituated to oppression, you do not mean that they give away a single, simple, tangible thing, and that *that* is the end of it;—not at all. You mean that they give up old habits of thought,—habits of action. You mean that every day of their lives thereafter they are to give up a habit, or a fancy, or a comfort. No mere promises of theirs to do this can be trusted. There must be guarantees fixed immutably, bedded into the constitution,—clamped into the laws. That same anchoring of liberties, and not "*transports et l'effusion de sentiments genereux*," is statesmanship.

These concessions were not thus secured. The old habits of oppression again got the upper hand. The upper class became as hostile to liberty and peace as ever.

Then thundered through France the Revolution. It *must* come;—that great and good French Revolution which did more to advance mankind in ten years than had been done politically in ten centuries,—which cost fewer lives to establish great principles than the Grand Monarque had flung away to gratify his whimsies! The right hand of the Almighty was behind it.

I refuse at the will of English Tory historians to lament more over the sufferings that besotted caste of oppressors brought upon themselves during those three years, than over the sufferings they brought upon the people during three times three centuries.*

The great thing was now partially done which Louis XI. and Richelieu had left entirely undone. The lower class were not merely freed from serfdom; they received guarantees of full civil rights.†

So far all was well, but at another point the constituent assembly stumbled. They were not bold enough to give full *political* rights. They thought the peasantry too ignorant—

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* Any American, whose ideas have been wrested Torywise by Alison, can satisfy himself of the utter inability of an English Tory to write any history involving questions of liberty, by simply looking at Chancellor Kent's notes attached to the chapter on America in the American reprint of Alison's History of Europe.

† *Constitution de* 1791, *Titre Premier.*

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too much debased by a long servitude, to be entrusted with political rights,—therefore they denied them, and invented for them "passive citizenship." *

It was skillfully devised, but none the less fatal. The denial of political rights to the enfranchised was one of the two great causes of the destruction of the Constitution of 1791, and of the inauguration of the Reign of Terror.

Political rights could not be refused long. As they could not be obtained in peace the freed peasantry never allowed France rest until it gained them by long years of bloodshed and anarchy. Revolution after revolution has failed of full results. Dynasty after dynasty has failed to give quiet until a great statesman in our own time, Napoleon III., has been bold enough to make suffrage universal.

Whatever the first French Revolution failed to do, it failed to do mainly by lack of bold faith in giving *political* rights;—whatever it succeeded in doing, it succeeded by giving full *civil* rights.

When Louis XVIII. was brought back by foreign bayonets, the nobility also came back jubilant; all seemed about to give France over to her old caste of oppressors. The revolution was gone, its great theories were gone, its great men were swept away by death and by discouragement worse than death.

But one barrier stood between France and all her old misery. That barrier stood firm; it was the enfranchised peasantry—possessing civil rights and confiscated property in land. Against these the whole might of the nobility beat in vain.

Peace came, and with peace prosperity. France had been fearfully shattered by ages of evil administration and false political economy; she had been devastated by wars without and within; she had been plundered of an immense indemnity by the allies; the best of her people had been swept off by conscriptions; but under the distribution of lands to the former serfs, and the full guarantee of civil rights and the germs of political rights, the nation showed an energy in recuperation

* *Constitution de* 1791, Titre III., Sect. 2, Art. 1.

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and a breadth of prosperity never before known in all her history.

There are other nations which, did time allow, might be summoned before us to aid our insight into the tendencies of castes habituated to oppression.

I might show from the annals of Germany how such a caste, having dragged the country through a thousand years of anarchy, have left it in chronic disunion,—the loss of all natural consideration, and oft-recurring civil wars, one of which is now devastating her.*

I might show from the history of Russia how the despotism of the Autocrat has been made necessary to save the empire from a worse foe—from a serf-mastering aristocracy. And I might go further and show how the statesmanship which has emancipated the lower class in Russia has recognized the great truth that the nation is not safe against the aristocracy—that no barrier can stand against them except the enfranchised endowed with rights and lands.†

But I am aware that an objection to this estimate of the noxious activity of an Aristocracy may be raised from the history of England.

It may be said that there the course of the nobles has been different—that some of the hardest battles against tyrants have been won by combination of nobles, that they have laid the foundations of free institutions, that, under monarchs who have hated national liberty, nobles have been among the foremost martyrs.

Let us look candidly at this.

It is true that the Earl of Pembroke and the Barons of England led the struggle for Magna Charta; it is true that the Earl of Leicester and his associate barons summoned the first

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* Any one wishing to see how that inevitable moral debasement came upon the German aristocracy, and in general what the oppressive caste came to finally, can find enough in the 2d vol. of Menzel's History of Germany.

† Gerbertzoff, *Hist. de la Civilisation en Russie.* Haxthausen, *Etudes sur la Russie.* A full sketch of the Rise and Decline of the serf system in Russia I have attempted in the Atlantic Monthly, Vol. X., page 538.

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really representative Parliament;* it is true that Surrey and Raleigh and Russell suffered martyrdom at the hands of tyrants.

It is true, moreover, that English nobles have not generally been so turbulent in what I have called the Vitriolic period, nor so debased in the Narcotic period, as most other European Aristocracies. They were, indeed, very violent in the wars of the Roses,—many of them were very debased under Charles the Second, and again under the first and last Georges, and it is quite likely will be again under that very unpromising ruler, Albert Edward, who seems developing the head of George the Third and the heart of George the Fourth†—but they have never been quite so violent or debased as the Continental nobles at similar periods.

But all this, so far from weakening the thesis I support, strengthens it—nay, clenches it.

For the nobility of England, less than any other in Europe, was based upon the oppression of a subject class. From the earliest period when law begins to be established in England we find that the serf system begins to be extinguished. The courts of law quietly adopted and steadily maintained the principle that in any question between lord and serf the presumption was in favor of the inferior's right to liberty rather than the superior's right to property.‡ The whole current set that way, and we find growing in England that middle class, steady and sturdy by the possession of rights, which won Agincourt and Crecy and Marston Moor and Worcester,—which made her country a garden and her cities marts for the world.§

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* *Creasy's History of English Constitution*;—but Hume says of Leicester's Parliament, that it was in the intention of reducing forever both the King and the people under the arbitrary power of a very narrow tyranny, which must have terminated either in anarchy or in violent usurpation and tyranny. Hist. of England, Chap. XII.

† I perhaps do the last two Georges injustice. Neither of them would have publicly insulted men of letters and science as the Prince of Wales has several times done recently.

‡ Creasy, Chap. IX.

§ Fischel on English Constitution, Chap. I., pp. 9, 11. Also Stephens' Edition of De Lolme.

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caste. Its coat may be mottled with romance, and smooth with sophistry, and glossy with civilization;—it may wind itself gracefully in chivalric courses; but its fangs will be found none the less venomous, its attacks none the less cruel, its skill in prolonging its reptile life, even after seeming death wounds, none the less deceitful.

Is it said that to grapple with such a reptile caste is dangerous? History shows not one example where the plain, hardy people have boldly faced it and throttled it and not conquered it.

The course is plain, and there is but one. Strike until the reptile caste spirit is scotched; then pile upon it a new fabric of civil and political rights until its whole organism of evil is crushed forever.

For this policy alone speaks the whole history of man,—to this policy alone stand pledged all the attributes of God.

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